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171928Z May 05

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 OTTAWA 001488

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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 04 STATE 088240

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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KPAO](#) [KISL](#) [PREL](#)

SUBJECT: RESPONDING TO ALLEGATIONS OF QURAN DESECRATION AT
GUANTANAMO

STATE 90992; OTTAWA 02731 (04)

[11.](#) Canadian media treatment: National media in Canada carried stories beginning May 11 of rioting in Kabul that resulted from the Newsweek report. Canadian media have followed the story with scrupulously "straight" reporting, primarily from international wire services and U.S. media, prominently noting DOD statements and Secretary Rice's on-the-record statement of May 13. All national media in Canada prominently report Newsweek's retraction on May 17. Indeed, Canadian media reporting as of May 17 is most focused on Newsweek's lack of responsibility and the state of American journalism, comparing the Newsweek report to CBS News reports of last autumn. Even the free-of-charge broadsheets distributed on the streets of Vancouver carry stories May 17 about Newsweek's Sunday apology. In short, Canadian media outlets have provided similar wide coverage to Newsweek's retraction as was given to the original allegations.

[12.](#) Reporting on the Sponsorship Scandal and a looming confidence vote for the Liberal minority government in Canada have pushed all international and bilateral stories to the inside pages and to the middle of broadcasts. That perhaps has prevented the Quran desecration allegations from becoming an overwhelming public issue in Canada.

[13.](#) Community Reaction: Reaction in Canada's large and significant Muslim communities also appears to have been muted, at least so far. Nevertheless, the Mission's Public Affairs offices have undertaken a number of direct efforts to reach out to significant Muslim community leaders and community media.

[14.](#) PA Ottawa sent the texts of Secretary Rice's statement on May 13 to the President of the Progressive Muslims Association of Ottawa with a courtesy note, expressing regret over violence the story had caused in the Middle East and expressing our profound respect for all religions, including Islam. PAO met with him and the Ottawa Imam at a previously scheduled social event May 14; both were typically courteous and friendly, neither of them raised the allegations.

[15.](#) PA Montreal sent the text of the Newsweek retraction and Editor Mark Whitaker's May 16 "From the Editor's Desk" article to 28 contacts in Montreal's Muslim community, including media outlets, Radio Middle East, the Maghreb Observateur, and Al Ahram Canada, as well as the Muslim Council of Montreal, the Algerian Cultural Center and the Canadian Council of Muslim Women. PAO Montreal forwarded these under a cover note expressing appreciation for their consideration of the retraction, and regretting the violence that the initial story had provoked. Consulate Montreal is currently organizing follow-up in its regular outreach program to the Muslim community and will have opportunities to discuss the situation further over the next several days.

[16.](#) PA Vancouver has engaged a contact at Vancouver's leading mosque who is working in the community to help create inter-religious understanding. PA Vancouver forwarded Secretary Rice's statement to this contact, who also works for the Vancouver Imam. PA Vancouver has also forwarded Secretary Rice's statement and the Newsweek retraction to the editor of the Vancouver Muslim community newspaper, "The Miracle."

[17.](#) Comment. Allegations of desecration of the Holy Quran have not become a major public affairs issue for the U.S. in Canada. Nevertheless, it underlines the importance of continuing to reach out to contacts in Canada's Muslim communities. In fact, this has given us an opportunity to take the initiative in discussing Americans' sincere respect for religion and the seriousness with which the U.S. government takes such a